

Theses on P.A. Verburg's Linguistic Theory

by A. Weideman

1. For several reasons language philosophy has once more become topical in linguistics.
2. The argument that linguistics has freed itself from philosophy, is itself of a philosophical, and not a linguistic, nature.
3. Verburg's linguistic theory is at once a development of and a radical departure from the philosophical vision he subscribes to.
4. Verburg's term 'clarify' can be used interchangeably with 'signify'.
5. It is curious that Verburg uses the term 'clarification' to describe the nature of language, but also links it up with the idea of communication, that he does not want to use ~~it~~ as a term to describe language.
6. Verburg's intention to include all human signs (speech, writing and gestures, i.a.) in the study of language must be applauded.
7. Other admirable features of his linguistic theory are:
 - 7.1 that he claims that the norms for language are of a prescientific nature;
 - 7.2 that he emphasizes the situation in which the speech act is performed and
 - 7.3 that he wants to confront and challenge the results of both synchronic and diachronic linguistics.
8. As in contemporary reformational philosophy, the uniqueness of the lingual aspect of reality, which is counterbalanced by its relation to other aspects, is acknowledged in Verburg's theory.
9. Verburg makes a sound contribution to the development of linguistics from a biblical starting-point in his analysis of the coherence of the lingual aspect of reality with other temporal aspects, yet there are quite a few gaps and inconsistencies in his theory about this coherence.
10. One must agree with Verburg that grammatical-syntactical study is only one part of linguistics.
11. Verburg's theory departs radically from his philosophical framework when he
 - 11.1 takes up the time order (i.e. an order of earlier and later) of the different modal aspects as a hierarchical order and
 - 11.2 treats the different aspects as concrete things.

12. It is a pity that Verburg, in spite of his intention to include all human lingual acts in the study of linguistics, implicitly restricts his theoretical analysis to human speech.
13. Verburg himself does not escape the trap of the form/content (word/meaning; exterior/interior; language/thought) scheme that he criticizes in the theories of von Humboldt and de Saussure.
14. A major problem in Verburg's theory is the paradoxical opposition of language and situation (which he tries to explain in terms of the duality of freedom and restriction) because this leaves him defenceless against the dualism of freedom and determinism in modern linguistics.
15. The departure that Verburg's theory makes from the philosophical perspective that he intends to develop in the field of linguistics, should probably be connected with the fact that he describes his own position as 'personalist-functionalism'.

Albert Weideman is a graduate student in linguistics at the University of the Orange Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa.